

The Suppleness of Being

Tonight we gather together to perform our ancient rituals of Teshuvah.

But what is teshuvah? It translates as repentance but it's Hebrew root means return. To what must we return?

As we move through life we all become distracted from our essential loving nature through experiences of hurt or loss, through unmet needs and desires, through feelings of guilt or shame. It is a natural process at times to lose touch with and forget the loving and forgiving souls we truly are.

Teshuvah is a return to truth, a return to our essential nature. Teshuvah is about second chances, a pathway toward forgiveness for the sake of **Transformation**.

Teshuvah reveals our capacity for reversal.

On the second day of RH, we read the story of the Akeidah –the Binding of Isaac.

This is a reversal story. A terrible outcome is averted, with the help of God.

Consider this: is the story defined **only** by the initial command to sacrifice a son?

Is it not the reversal of this command at the end, that actually allows us to read the story in the first place? What if instead of naming it “The Binding of Isaac,” we called it “The Ram in the Thicket” or “The Education of Abraham”?

In the poem *Yigdal* that appears at the end of Fri. night services, we sing: *mabit le'sof davar b'kadmato*- God sees the end in the beginning. And in the beginning of the Holy Zohar it says, “the end is embedded in the beginning and the

beginning in the end. “ The end matters. Life is in a process and reversals are possible, with a change in awareness.

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak teaches that there is a spiritual secret embedded in the name of this Hebrew month- this month that begins our new year. The name of this month is Tishrei. When we look at its letters, *Tav-Shin-Reish*, we notice that they are the last 3 letters of the Hebrew Alphabet, only here they appear in reverse order. Instead of *Reish -Shin -Tav*, they appear as *Tav, Shin Reish*.

The final three letters of the alphabet are read in reverse order, from the end to the beginning. And so too, our tradition requires that we turn back and move closer to our source, to a condition before rigidity and habit set in; formed in the image of God, kind and compassionate, patient and loving.

Tonight and tomorrow we will be engaged in prayer over a period of 25 hours.

Why do we pray and what is prayer really?

The word “to pray” in Hebrew is *l’hitpallel*. It is a reflexive verb, that is: it refers to something we do to ourselves. An example of a reflexive verb is “to get dressed.” We may dress others, but we **get dressed**. This is what we do to ourselves. In Hebrew the word for prayer is *L’hitpallel*, a reflexive verb which can be conceived of as, **we get prayed**. Normally, prayer is thought of as communication with the Divine. But prayer is also meant to be a self-transformative activity. Prayer is a tool and on Yom Kippur this tool is meant help us soften our hearts and create a supportive environment for forgiveness.

Tonight and tomorrow we will chant the 13 middot, the 13 attributes of God, several times reminding ourselves of God's forgiving qualities. On Mt. Sinai when Moses prays for God to forgive the people after the sin of the Golden Calf, God instructs Moshe, that he should pray with these words:

Adonai Adonai- Eternal Eternal,

EL Rachum v'chanun- Compassionate and merciful

Erech apayim- patient

Rav hesed- full of lovingkindness

V'emet- truthful

The Hasidic Master Me'or Einayim points out that when G-d instructs Moses to use these words to achieve forgiveness, G-d says "do this." G-d intends that we actually embody these qualities, not just recite these words. In other words, these are the qualities **We** need to manifest in order to make the transformation of forgiveness, possible. **We** need to embody compassion, mercy, patience, kindness and truthfulness. As we chant these words this Yom Kippur, let us imagine that with each utterance, we are ourselves, inhabiting these qualities more fully. Let us 'get prayed' through these words.

In all of these teachings on teshuvah, on forgiveness and on prayer lie the assumption that we have within us a certain suppleness of being. We are more pliable than we realize. As we move through this Yom Kippur experience, through fasting and prayer, we have the capacity to use these ancient spiritual tools to

access that suppleness, to soften the places in ourselves that have become calcified.

Hashiveinu Adonai eilekha v'nashuvah: Return us to You, Source of Life, and we will return. Hadesh yameinu kikedem: Renew our days as it once was, in the beginning, when all was in balance, when all was whole and at peace.